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ABSTRACT

Individually Guided Education (IGE) in a Multi-Init School (MUS-E) is a comprehensive model for organizing an elementary school. This system incorporates non-graded multi-aged grouping, shared decisionmaking, differentiated staffing, a team approach, and instructional programming based on individual student needs. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of applying the IGE/MUS-E concepts to an upper elementary reading program consisting of 140 pupils in need of remediation. A team approach was used to design reading instruction, including a specific skills instruction period and an interest center period in which those skills could be applied. At the end of one year, mean word recognition test scores, mean comprehension scores and mean total reading scores as measured by the Metropolitan Reading Test showed over one year in growth. An improvement in self-concept, skill level, and attitude toward reading was noted. No statistical controls were used. (KS)

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IGE and the Multi-Unit School: An Examination of its Influence on an Upper Elementary Reading Program

Individually Guided Education (IGE) in a Multi-Unit School (MUS-E) is a comprehensive model for systematically organizing an elementary school. This system incorporates several innovative developments including non-graded multi-aged grouping patterns, shared decision-making, differentiated staffing, a team approach, and an instructional programming model which attempts to provide a program of instruction based on the learning style and needs of each pupil (Nelson, 1972). It is not a formula, but rather a framework around which a school develops a total organizational plan according to its unique needs.

Many factors influence the reading instruction within a given school. For the teacher, the organizational scheme of the building has a strong effect. Reading instruction in a traditional self-contained situation will differ markedly from the instruction that takes place in a non self-contained situation. It is the purpose of this paper to look at the effect the adoption of a specific organizational and instructional plan had on the design and implementation of the reading program in the upper grades of an elementary school.

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Research involving the IGE/MUS-E concepts offered some insight into this problem. Results of a study by R. G. Nelson (1972) concluded that students in the IGE-MUS-E organizational structure generally have a more favorable learning climate than pupils in traditionally organized schools. He found that students in IGE/MUS-E schools scored significantly higher on measures of attitude toward: self-concept as learners, fellow pupils, instruction, school morale, school plant, and community.

How does the environment characterized by the IGE/MUS-E organizational structure affect student academic achievement? Charles Willis (1974), in an interim report on IGE from I/D/E/A/, summarized IGE's impact on student achievement test scores as mixed, with some schools reporting significant improvement and others finding no difference. He noted that no studies have been reported which indicate a significant decrease in student achievement following IGE implementation.

Looking at reading specifically, Burtley (1974) found that multi-aged second and third grade students in an IGE school achieved significantly greater mean gain reading scores than the students in a traditional school when measured over a two-year time period.

Studies conducted by the University of Oregon's Center for Advanced Study of Educational Administration (Pellegrin, 1969) attributed high job satisfaction and increased effectiveness in the Multi-Unit School to teacher involvement in the decisions

affecting their work and to the belief of the teachers that they had the power to affect decisions which would result in change.

PROBLEM

The elementary school is located in a middle class suburb of an urban area with a population of 500,000. The school population is almost entirely White with only a few Black and Chicano students. After testing on the Metropolitan Reading Achievement Test, it was found that over 20% of the fifth and sixth grade students were reading below the third grade level.

OBJECTIVES

Utilizing the concepts of shared decision-making and team planning, all the fifth and sixth grade teachers worked together as a unit for the purpose of planning reading instruction. Their initial task was to ascertain the needs of this particular group of children.

1. these students were deficient in basic word recognition and comprehension skills
2. they had low self-concepts in reading
3. they had limited personal organizational skills
4. reading was not viewed as useful or enjoyable; on the contrary, it was a source of discomfort and something to be avoided
5. these students had difficulty tolerating long periods of physical inactivity or sustained attention to a single task

As a result of this needs assessment, the following objectives were set:

1. to increase the students' reading ability
2. to improve their self-concepts and personal management skills
3. to provide instruction based upon assessed skill needs, learning style, and interest
4. to provide learning experiences in which reading would be used as a problem-solving tool, for informational purposes, or for enjoyment
5. to develop an instructional management design which reflected the concepts inherent in IGE and the Multi-Unit School

METHOD

The unit consisted of three fifth grade teachers, three sixth grade teachers and 140 ten, eleven, and twelve year old children. A reading consultant was available on a shared time basis. In designing the program, the unit had to work within the confines of the regular school budget. They were given no extra money for special materials or aides. They did, however, have the advantage of a parent volunteer program and a cluster of student teachers in the building. The instructional time was limited to one hour and fifteen minutes daily.

Flexible grouping patterns were hindered because a preselected group of students reading approximately one to two years below grade level were involved in a state-funded program over which the unit had limited control. This resulted in the remaining group of children being either at

the upper or lower range of ability in reading. Because of this vast range, the unit broke into smaller planning teams. One fifth grade teacher, one sixth grade teacher and the reading consultant took on the task of providing a meaningful reading program for the thirty-five students whose reading levels ranged from non-reader to third grade.

A format was needed which would involve the students in their own learning; one with flexibility so that time would fit the activities rather than the other way around; and one that would be motivating for children.

The final solution was to organize the program to emphasize two main areas. The first was for instruction in needed skill areas -- either in small groups or individually. The second was interest center time. Centers with activities pertaining to different student interests were set up and the students selected those centers they wished to attend. These usually ran in three to four week cycles so each student could get to each center during the three or four weeks. These centers were not used as a reward for completing work during skills time, but were an integral part of the program. All children attended the centers.

Records were kept in individual student folders. These usually took the form of contracts between student and teacher. They not only recorded a child's progress, but also served to involve students in the planning of their program and provided a feeling of accomplishment when their goals were

reached. In the beginning, the contracts were very teacher-directed, but as the school year progressed, the contracts became more student-directed.

SPECIFIC SKILLS TIME

During this time, students received instruction in areas where they lacked specific word recognition and comprehension skills. The needed skills were determined through the use of criterion referenced tests and teacher diagnosis as a result of observation. Each teacher took the responsibility of planning instruction for a smaller multi-aged group of children. Extra help was available from student teachers and parent volunteers which resulted in more time spent on individual needs. Instructional techniques used included skill grouping, peer tutoring, and individualized contracts. A wide variety of instructional material was used.

INTEREST CENTER TIME

Grouping for this time was done according to interest. A series of centers would run for a three or four week period of time. Students scheduled themselves into these centers for a week and contracted to complete certain activities. At the end of the week, they received immediate reinforcement on work completed. The number of centers during any given cycle depended on the number of student teachers and parent volunteers available. Planning had to remain flexible in case the activities ran longer than a week. Reading was a

part of these centers, but was usually incidental to the activities. The primary objectives of these centers were to motivate, to get the students to use reading as a tool, and to show that reading can be part of a fun activity. Some examples of our interest centers are listed below.

Free Reading - talk with teacher about book
Listening Center - tapes and books
Newspaper Job Cards
Telephones - using phone books
Storytellers - reading to younger children
Outdoor Activities - ecology
Madison Avenue - making commercials
Game Shows - listening and asking questions
Write and Type
Filmstrips
Plays
Careers
Batiking
Terrariums
Poster Making
Woodworking
Cooking
Reading Games
Models
Kite Making

The most serious limitations encountered were money for materials and the talents of those planning the centers.

During the three weeks before Christmas, parent volunteers were harder to find and the student teachers were gone. To compensate, the entire group put on a play. Lines were learned and memorized with everyone having a part. The play was performed for all the children in the school and two performances had to be given at the Christmas program so all the parents could see it. The play was photographed and written up in the county paper. It was something to see children who had never been "good enough" to be in a play, suddenly find themselves in the limelight.

RESULTS

The results of this experience can be divided into two categories -- tangible and intangible. The tangible results, taken from Metropolitan Reading Achievement Test scores, are listed on the following page.

MEAN GRADE EQUIVALENT SCORES - METROPOLITAN READING TEST

May 1974 - May 1975

	Mean - May 1974	Mean - May 1975	Mean Gain
Word Knowledge	2.56	3.89	+1.33
Reading Comprehension	2.65	3.75	+1.10
Total Reading	2.54	3.81	+1.27

Intangible results are usually shyed away from because they cannot be computed and shown on a graph or chart. But they are just as real. They are emotional rather than rational and may or may not be valid. How can you measure the closeness that developed among teachers and students? Is it possible to treat statistically the smile on a child's face when he hears a friend tell him what a "neat reading group" he is in. Many times we heard students from other reading groups express the desire to join ours. Can you chart the picture of a young non-reader struggling, on his own, to read a newspaper article about his play -- or the pride of a little girl who sees someone reading her story in the reading center?

During the year, the McCracken Standardized Reading Inventory was administered on three occasions -- September, January and May. In September, it took only a few mistakes and the students didn't want any more to do with it. In May, they wanted to keep going, regardless of the trouble they were having

pronouncing the words. Does this show an increase in confidence -- self-concept -- or is it meaningless because it can't be graphed? All word recognition scores were higher, but the real difference was the attitude with which they approached the test.

These results are real to those who were involved in this program. But measuring them and communicating what we saw is a next to impossible task.

CONCLUSION

It must be remembered when evaluating these results that this was not an experiment. Statistical controls were not part of our design. It is an example of a team of teachers trying a different approach to reading instruction involving slow readers. When the program was evaluated by the unit at the end of the year, they felt it was a success. The IGE and Multi-Unit concepts provided the needed foundation for the success of the program. Self-confidence in reading did improve; skill levels did improve; and attitude toward reading did improve. Attitude change is hard to measure. But, when fifth and sixth graders give up recess periods to voluntarily help clean up after an interest center, they feel the experience is important.

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